

## IN BRIEF

## Vaccinations against virus begin for teachers

The Clatsop County COVID Vaccine Task Force has begun vaccinating school teachers against the coronavirus.

The task force said 400 teachers from the Astoria, Jewell, Knappa, Seaside and Warrenton school districts were vaccinated at two vaccination events on Tuesday and Thursday.

Child care providers, early learning and private school personnel are next on the priority list. Vaccinations are not yet available for seniors or the general public.

As of Friday, 3,071 vaccines have been administered — 2,593 first doses and 478 second doses.

The task force is seeking volunteers to help in a variety of tasks, including answering phones at the public information call center and helping at vaccination events.

People can fill out a survey on the county's website to help the task force notify them when they are eligible to receive a vaccine, as well as other updates.

Anyone with questions can email covid19vaccine@clatsopeoc.com.

## Seaside balances competing concerns in school reopening plan

SEASIDE — As the Seaside School District continues to wrestle with the decision of how and when to reopen schools to in-person instruction, early learners are being given top priority.

"Right now, if case counts don't continue to rise, we could begin hybrid instruction with some of our elementary students," Superintendent Susan Penrod said during a school board meeting last week.

The goal is to start bringing kindergarten and first graders back as early as Feb. 15, but the school district is waiting to evaluate Clatsop County's case count.

"We have had, as we all know, a lot of change this year," Penrod said. "I am very thankful to our leadership team for their flexibility and our staff for their flexibility as well and to our parents and our students."

## County commissioners approve strategic plan

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday unanimously approved a strategic plan.

The county hired the Portland State University Center for Public Service in January 2020 to guide the strategic planning process.

The board chose five focus areas: governance; infrastructure; economic development; environmental quality; and social services.

County Manager Don Bohn said the next step will be for the county to take the 14 actions identified and develop more detailed work plans for the board and work them into the budget process.

"And again, it's a cycle that we'd like to really implement so that it is very predictable for the board and for staff," Bohn said. "So there will be another process next fall that will then lead to a new series of priorities and an accounting of the priorities that you just established and then going through the budget process, performance benchmarks."

## County commissioners approve declaration of cooperation on elk

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday unanimously approved the Clatsop Plains Elk Collaborative Declaration of Cooperation.

The declaration is the first phase of a project that began in April 2019 when Gov. Kate Brown designated the Clatsop Plains Elk Collaborative as an Oregon Solutions Project.

The document supports elk culling in unincorporated parts of the county.

— The Astorian

## ON THE RECORD

### Assault

• Matthew Blaine Jacobsen, 39, of Astoria, was arrested Thursday on Floral Street in Astoria for assault in the fourth degree.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

### SATURDAY

**Seaside City Council**, 9 a.m., goal setting, (electronic meeting).

### MONDAY

**Astoria City Council**, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

### TUESDAY

**Clatsop County Board of Commissioners**, noon, work session, (electronic meeting).

**Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors**, 4 p.m., workshop, (electronic meeting).

**Clatsop County Health District**, 5 p.m., (electronic meeting).

**Astoria Library Board**, 5:30 p.m., Astoria Library, 450 10th St.

**Cannon Beach City Council**, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

**Seaside Planning Commission**, 6 p.m., cityofseaside.us.

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# PREPARATION



Luke Whittaker/Chinook Observer

Safe Coast Seafoods, which is replacing Jessie's in Ilwaco, is preparing to open for the commercial Dungeness crab season.

# Warrenton adopts planning code amendment as a 'safety valve'

By NICOLE BALES  
The Astorian

WARRENTON — The City Commission unanimously approved a code amendment Tuesday allowing the city manager and planning director to appeal decisions made by the Planning Commission.

City staff and city commissioners described the amendment as a "safety valve" that can be used to rectify decisions made by the Planning Commission if they were based on incomplete or inaccurate information provided by the community development director.

The amendment was drafted in response to two decisions made by the Planning Commission in recent years while Kevin Cronin served as community development director.

"This covers, in my experience, a very rare circumstance," Mark Barnes, a consultant and former city planner for Cannon Beach, said during a public hearing on Jan. 12. The city hired Barnes part time while conducting a search to replace Cronin, who left in June after being hired as the city manager of Mount Angel.

The city hired Scott Hess, a former director of community and economic development with the Wasatch Front Regional Council in Salt Lake City, in October.

"I've been doing this for a long time — almost 40 years — and I have never seen a planning director appeal the decision of the Planning Commission to their governing body," Barnes said. "I understand you had a circumstance last year before I arrived that might have warranted this, but that's a pretty unusual circumstance."

Mayor Henry Balensifer described two recent scenarios when he said the development code has not been applied consistently.

After Wendy's opened at the already busy Warrenton Highlands retail center in April 2019, city leaders began hearing complaints from residents about traffic backups.

The city had agreed with a traffic study from Wendy's that determined a painted intersection on Ensign Lane



Nicole Bales/The Astorian

Traffic was an issue when Wendy's first opened in Warrenton.

*'WE FELT LIKE WE HAVE BEEN SORT OF NOT GIVEN ALL THE INFORMATION AT ALL TIMES.'*

Paul Mitchell | chairman of the Planning Commission

paid for by the developers would be sufficient.

Balensifer said, "public works had raised significant concerns about the traffic flow, and there was some concessions made, but it kind of still moved full steam ahead. And ... a staff member who sees a major issue, should you be able to say, 'Hey, this isn't going to work.'"

Last February, Cronin admitted the city erred in not requiring Clatsop County to build sidewalks along nearly 950 feet of 19th Street from Ensign Lane to the site of the new county jail.

The Planning Commission approved the county's design of the new jail in January 2020 with a multi-use path covered in reflective green paint to delineate it from the roadway.

Planning Commissioner Christine Bridgens, who was the only commissioner to vote against the application, found the city's sidewalk requirement after the meeting and wanted to redo the vote.

She had attempted to appeal the decision, but was not allowed because she had

voted on the issue. Only the applicant or someone who gave testimony could appeal the decision.

"So in this case, if there was an issue that needed to be brought up or a question of law that had been brought up, it could be then remanded up through the process to the commission to make another decision," Balensifer said. "In my mind, that's a check and balance that history in Warrenton proves to me is needed."

The Planning Commission unanimously recommended the City Commission not adopt the amendment.

"We come from a place, I think, over the last couple of years where we as a commission have felt very much like we've had ... an ongoing relationship with our former planning director that lacked a certain amount of trust," Paul Mitchell, the chairman of the Planning Commission, said. "With that, we felt like we have been sort of not given all the information at all times."

"So sometimes when we make a decision, it is not all the information that I think that we were supposed to

be given the first time, or it's been forgotten. I understand now that's a great reason why you would probably want to have the ability to correct some of the things we did.

"I want you to know, we feel very confident with the interim we had and now our new planning director. I feel like we're on a good path moving forward."

However, Mitchell said, if the City Commission does not trust the Planning Commission's decisions based on the information it is getting from staff, "and you want to make changes, why have a Planning Commission?"

He said he hopes to increase communication and understanding between the City Commission and Planning Commission through a joint session.

City Manager Linda Engbretson assured the Planning Commission that the rule change is not a power grab.

"But, you know, staff isn't perfect," she said. "And occasionally, maybe there's a fatal flaw that's found, and this particular situation there was no remedy to fix that."

"I can't imagine having to, nor do I want to on a regular basis overrule the decision-making. But this is an opportunity, if there is a fatal flaw or something that has been overlooked, that is a pretty major issue that we have an opportunity to bring it forward."

**Volunteer Pick of the Week**

**Tally**

3 year old female Anatolian Shepherd/Lab

Perfect dog for destinations near and far, for favorite haunts and roads less traveled.

(Read about the pet of the week on Facebook)

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